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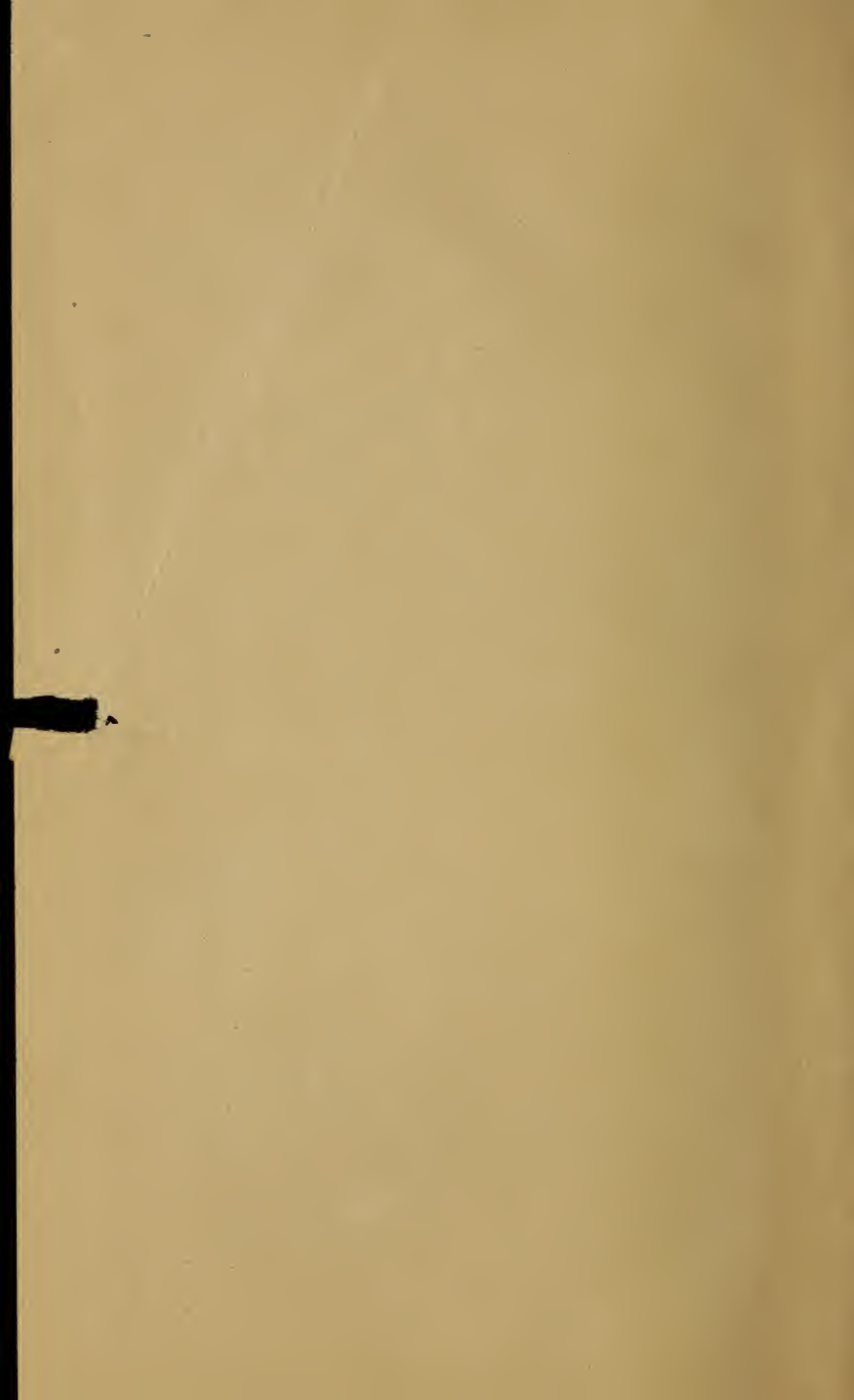
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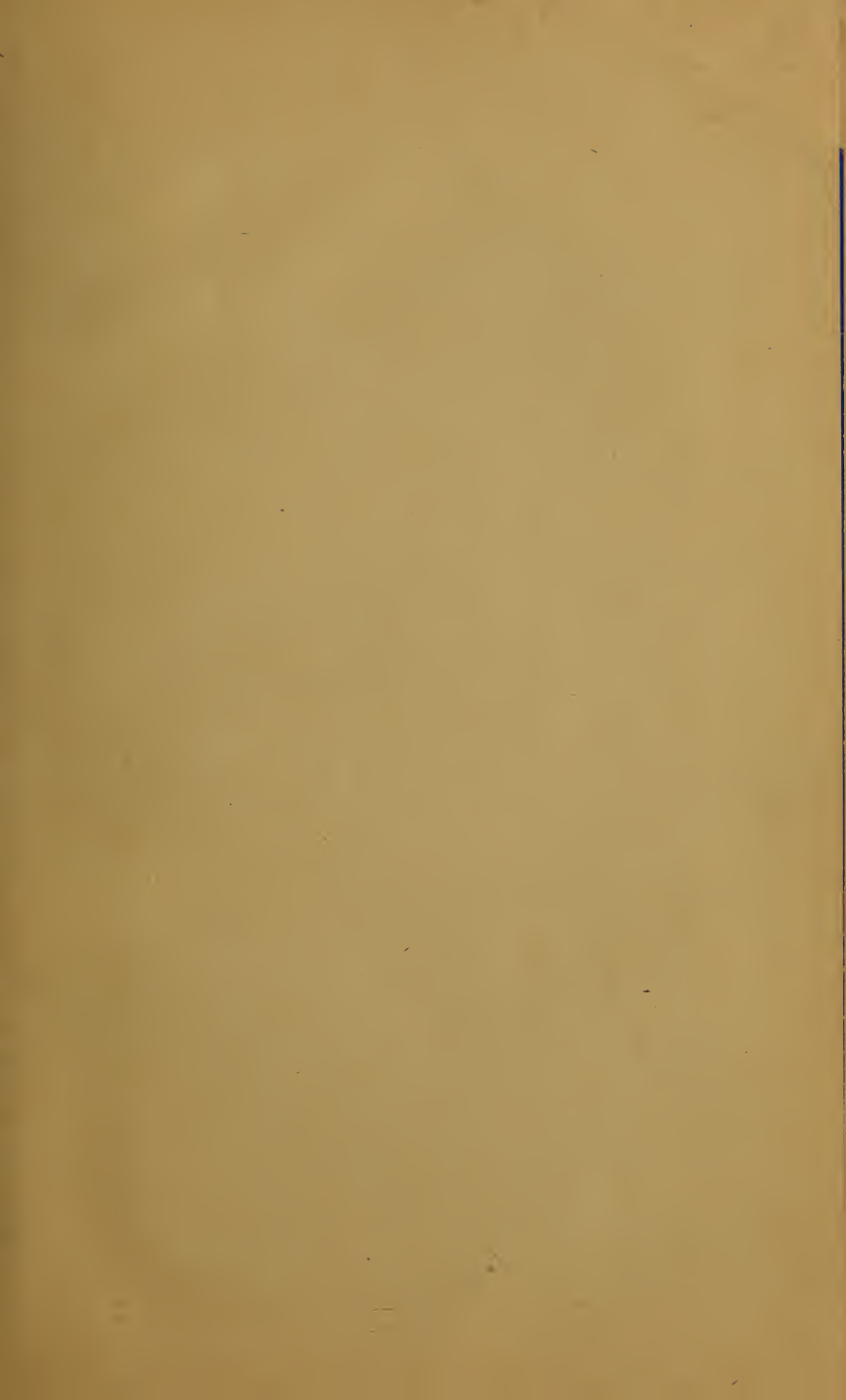
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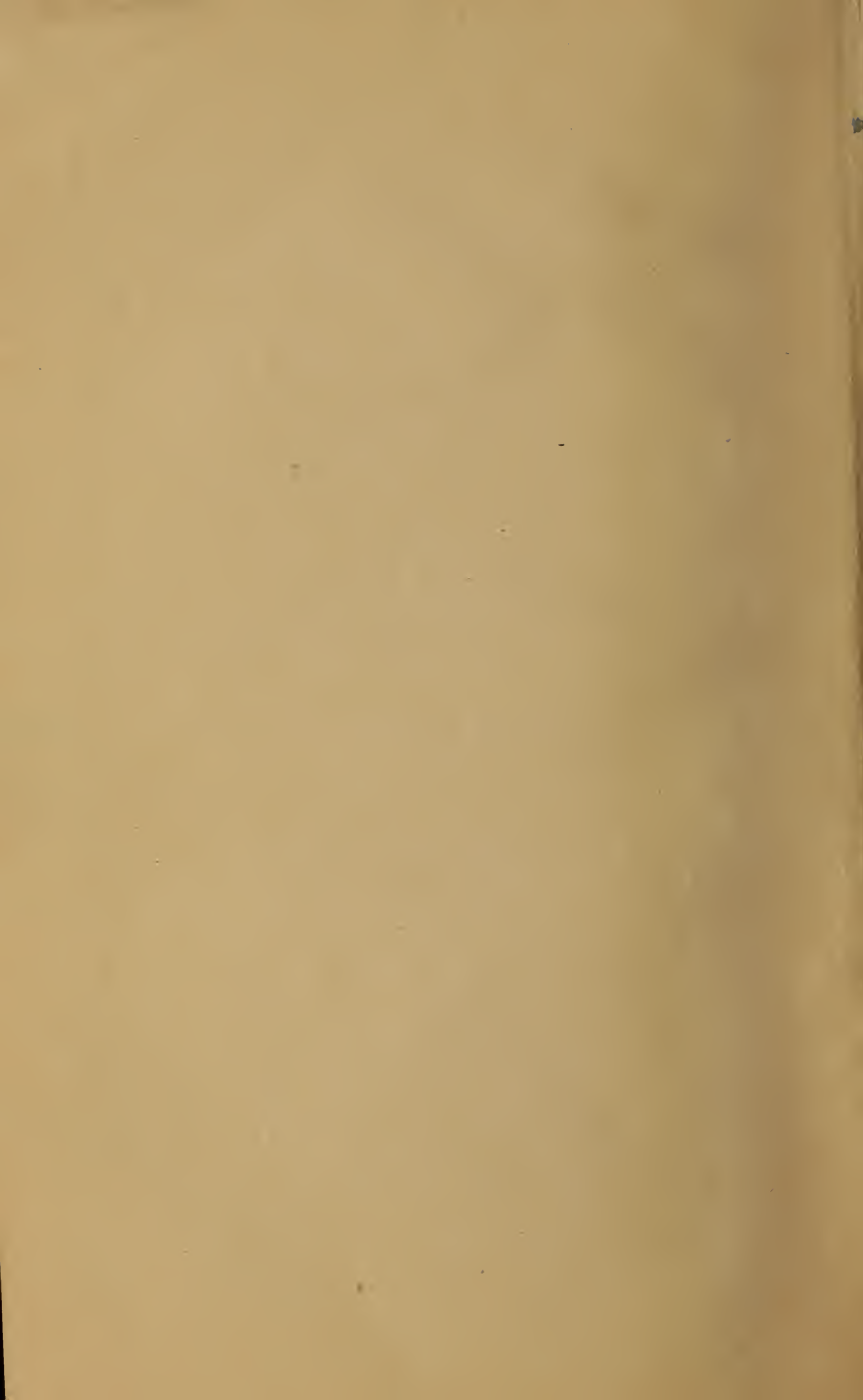
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THE HISTORY  
OF  
OUR NATIONAL FLAG,

BY  
MAJOR-GEN'L SCHUYLER HAMILTON.



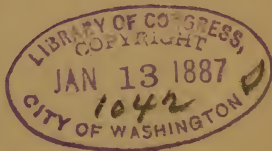
OUR NATIONAL FLAG,  
"THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER."



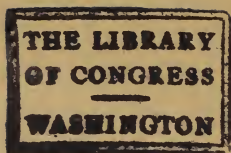
THE HISTORY OF IT.

BY

MAJOR GEN'L SCHUYLER HAMILTON.



NEW-YORK:  
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## PREFACE.

In 1852 the author, by request of General Winfield Scott, prepared with great care a monograph on the National Flag of the United States of North America.

This history met with general acceptance, but unfortunately the bulk of the edition was destroyed by fire. The frequent inquiries as to where copies can be procured has induced the preparation of the following condensed account of our national flag. Every school-boy and school-girl in the land should be familiar with the chief points in the history of their country's ensign. How few of our citizens know them, even among those who by land and sea have periled their lives in defense of it, is matter of surprise. The author vouches, without hesitation, the general accuracy of his statements.

SCHUYLER HAMILTON,  
*Major General.*

NEW YORK CITY, October, 1886.



# OUR NATIONAL FLAG,

“THE STAR-SPANGLED BANNER.”

## THE HISTORY OF IT.

**A**MONG all the nations of antiquity, especially the heathen nations, their ensigns (the origin of the word is *in signo*, “in sign of”) were in one way or another the effigy of, or something representing, the god or gods they worshiped. It would be idle to attempt to enumerate them. Nor was this practice confined to heathen nations. When the Israelites strove with Amalek and the victory rested with Israel, Moses, in memory of this victory, caused an altar to be built and inscribed upon it, *Jehovah nissi*,—“The Lord is our ensign, or banner.”

The ensign of each tribe of Israel, it is said, was an illustration upon the tribal banner,—which was of the color of the stone in the breast-plate of the high priest, as an emblem of the tribe,—of the blessing of Jacob to his son, the progenitor of

the tribe. For example: "The Lion of the tribe of Judah," etc. (Genesis, chap. xlix.)

After the Roman Emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity by a cross in the heavens, and the legend or words, *In hoc signo vinces* ("In this sign conquer"), the cross became a common ensign. The emperors of Rome, however, adhered to the eagle. When the Roman Empire became divided into the Eastern and Western Empires, the emperors of each portion claimed the sovereignty of the whole, and to typify it used a double-headed eagle.

This double-headed eagle became the ensign of Russia, as it is to-day, on the marriage of Ivan I. of Russia to a Grecian princess, heiress of the Eastern Empire.

With the title of Roman Emperor it passed from the Western Empire to the Emperor of Austria. A double-headed eagle is at present the ensign of Austria.

The crescent, now the ensign of the Turks, was a Christian symbol, and formed from all antiquity the symbol of Byzantium or Constantinople. On the overthrow of this empire by Mohammed II., the Turks, regarding the crescent, which everywhere met their eye on the churches and cathedrals of Constantinople, as a good omen, adopted it as their chief bearing.

Colonel Moultrie, during the struggle between Great Britain and the colonies of North America, caused a blue flag to be made, with a crescent in one corner, to be in uniform with the troops. It was used in the taking of Fort Johnston on James's Island, South Carolina. It was doubtless as an "emblem of sovereignty" it was adopted by Colonel Moultrie.

At the time of the Crusades, the Pope gave to each nation a special cross. To the English a red cross on a white banner, the standard of the cross vertical, the cross piece horizontal, called the Cross of St. George, and their war cry was "St. George and Merry England." To the Scots was assigned the Cross of St. Andrew, a peculiar cross called a "saltire" or "saltier," white on a blue ground, extending from corner to corner of the square blue banner and crossing at the center. On a similar cross St. Andrew is supposed to have been crucified. The cross of St. Patrick is also a saltier, but red on a white ground. On January 1, 1801, on the union of Great Britain and Ireland, the cross of St. Patrick was introduced into the great union ensign of Great Britain by laying upon the white saltier of St. Andrew the red saltier of St. Patrick. The white banner from which it came and the white saltier of St. Andrew, upon which it was as it were overlaid, are preserved by the white

margin, according to the rules of heraldry, as may be seen by examining any ensign of Great Britain and Ireland of the present day. The national flag of Ireland, according to "Chambers's Encyclopedia," exhibits a golden harp with silver strings on a green field. The origin of the harp seems to be lost in the mazes of antiquity.

The Scots and English, constantly at war with each other, were jealous to the last degree of their respective banners. A banner, by the way, is always square. A knight or knight bachelor, as he was called, carried a pennon or guidon with an indent similar to the tail of a swallow. The word guidon is a corruption of the Norman French words *guyd-homme* ("guide-man"). In the United States service every company of cavalry has its guidon.

When a knight bachelor distinguished himself, especially in battle, he was summoned before the king, and in the presence of the troops the indent was cut from his pennon or guidon, thus transforming it into a square banner, and from thenceforth he was styled a knight banneret, or knight bearing a banner.

It has been said above the Scots and English were excessively jealous of their respective banners. When James VI. of Scotland became also James I. of England, his subjects of North and South Britain, as they were called, had frequent

fight on the high seas, even cannonading each other, because each claimed the other should first lower his colors in salutation.

To put a stop to such disorders, King James ordered his heralds to prepare a flag, a union of the two flags, and called the “king’s colors.” This flag all his subjects, both Scotch and English, were ordered to wear on their ships, on their maintop; and on their foretop, those of South Britain or England, the red cross, as they were wont; and the subjects of North Britain or of Scotland, on their foretop the white cross, as they were accustomed.

It was the custom for soldiers marching under a banner such as above described to wear a short shirt over their armor with the cross of their banner inscribed upon it, before and behind, or else upon the shoulders. From this came our term crusaders, in French *croisé*, or “cross-bearer.” This shirt was usually the color of the banner. Hence the red coats of the British soldiery, and the blue bonnets, blue coats, and blue ribbons of the lowland Scotch. The Highlanders wore the plaid of their clan. The pretty nursery ballad,—

“Oh, dear! what can the matter be?  
Dear! dear! what can the matter be?  
Oh, dear! what can the matter be,  
Johnny ’s so long at the fair?”

He promised to bring me a bunch of blue ribbons  
To tie up my bonny brown hair.  
He promised to bring me a basket of posies,  
A garland of lilies, a garland of roses ;  
A little straw hat to set off the blue ribbons  
That tie up my bonny brown hair,"—

arose from the pride of the Scotch maidens in their national color.

The shirts worn over the armor were called *jacques* or *jackets*, and hence the flags bearing the crosses were called *jacks*. We hear to-day of *St. George's jacks*, *St. Andrew's jacks*, and *union jacks*. The *union jack* of the United States is the simple white-starred union of our national ensign : at the same time the highest grades of officers in the navy and army are distinguished by a star or stars upon their epaulettes, and the sailors by stars upon the collars of their blue shirts. Sailors got their name of "*Jack Tars*" from wearing shirts similar to those described above ; for the same reason, even, the heavy boots of the cavalry were called "*jack boots*."

On the union of England and Scotland into the kingdom of Great Britain, under the treaty entered into on January 10, 1707, the king's colors became the great union flag of Great Britain, and with a red field was the ensign for all British merchant ships

and the ordinary British ensign by sea and land, and was commonly called the “Union flag.”

To go back for a moment to the red-cross flag. Mr. Endicott at Salem, Massachusetts, cut a portion of the cross out of the ensign, averring the cross savored of popery. At the next General Court Mr. Endicott was called in question about defacing the cross in the ensign, and still later was sharply censured and left out of the magistracy for having done so, among other reasons because his act might give “the state of England reason to think ill of us.”

Nevertheless, owing to the superstition of the people, the red-cross flag was laid aside for a time, and red and white roses substituted for it. Finally, in 1651 (it was the time of the Commonwealth in England), the General Court passed a resolve “that, inasmuch as the Parliament of England in the war with King Charles I. had used the red-cross flag, and it being a badge of distinction between the English and the other nations, in all places of the world, till the state of England alter the same, which we much desire, we, being of the same nation, the captain of the fort at Boston will advance the same upon the castle upon all necessary occasions.” The state of England did not see fit to alter the ensign, and the red-cross flag continued the ensign of England

and its dependencies until the union with Scotland, when the banner of St. George and the banner of St. Andrew conjoined, as previously described, became the ensign of Great Britain.

In regard to the great union flag of Great Britain, there are several things to be noticed. King James was a Scot. King James was learned in the Bible, and the blue ground of St. Andrew's banner was God's color. In the fifteenth chapter of Numbers, verses 37-39, it is written: "And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribbon of blue: And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord, and do them," etc.

It will be observed that the red cross laid on the St. Andrew's banner had a white margin, to show it came from a white flag. Here we must go back a moment; but all history is going back to what went on before, with the reason of it. Endicott's cutting a part of the cross out of the ensign because it savored of popery and was esteemed idolatrous has been mentioned. It will, perhaps, be somewhat surprising to learn that more than a century

later the same sentiments still swayed the common mind.

When the remarkable effort of New England vigor in 1745, which, resulting in the capture of Louisburg, Cape Breton, astonished the world, was set on foot, many of the 40,000 men raised by New England under Colonel Wm. Pepperell, of New Hampshire, were unwilling to march under the great Union flag of Great Britain, because of the crosses. “To still men’s minds,” Colonel Pepperell asked the eminent Methodist divine, George Whitefield, then itinerating through the colonies, to give him a motto for the obnoxious flag, which perforce had to be used. Whitefield gave the motto, *Nil desperandum Christo Duce* (“Nothing is to be despaired of, Christ being the leader”). This gave the undertaking the character of a crusade. Louisburg surrendered. The troops employed were paid by Massachusetts in paper money. This was the first time paper money was used on this continent.

During the popular excitement which led to our Revolution, Union flags, bearing various mottoes, were displayed throughout the colonies. They were simply the British ensign. The colonists claimed only the rights of British subjects. Every one then knew a Union flag was the ensign of Great Britain, though probably very many did not know why. No one paused to describe them.

The first blood shed in our Revolution was at Lexington, Mass., April 19, 1775. June 17, 1775, the battle of Bunker's Hill was fought. On July 18th, 1775, General Israel Putnam, in command of the Continental troops in front of Boston, having received a declaration of the Congress of the Colonies, setting forth the causes and necessity for taking up arms, caused it to be read to the troops, and a red flag, bearing the mottoes of Massachusetts and Connecticut in gold, was displayed on Prospect Hill. The motto of Massachusetts was, "Appeal to Heaven." That of Connecticut was, *Qui transtulit sustinet* ("He who brought us across the ocean sustains us"). Thus this flag signified union.

A Committee of Conference was sent by Congress to arrange with General Washington the details of the organization of the new army, which went into being January 2, 1776. This committee consisted of Benjamin Franklin, Mr. Lynch, and Mr. Harrison. Dr. Franklin had urged the union of the colonies by a serpent at the head of his newspaper, *The Philadelphia Gazette*, divided into thirteen parts, each part marked with the initials of the colony it represented, viz., N. H., M. B., Conn., etc. (Maine was then a part of Massachusetts, and Massachusetts was called Massachusetts Bay), and the motto, "Join or die." After the union was

effected he changed the head-piece of his paper to a united or whole serpent with the motto, “Union is strength.” This wise statesman and patriot and his coadjutors, notably General Washington, could not forget the object of the then pending struggle was not independence, but the rights and liberties of British subjects. So for an ensign for the colonies, they fixed upon the great Union flag of Great Britain in the upper canton, or corner, with thirteen stripes, alternate red and white, a stripe for each colony, constituting the field. The stripe, or ribbon, though an old heraldic emblem, was especially appropriate for the flag of the colonies to distinguish it from that of the mother country. Shortly after assuming command of the army without uniforms before Boston, General Washington, under the dates of July 14 and July 23, 1775, published orders directing that the commander-in-chief would be distinguished by a *light blue* ribbon worn across his breast between his coat and waistcoat; the major-generals, by a purple ribbon; and the brigadier-generals, by a pink ribbon. The field officers were to have red or pink cockades in their hats; the captains, yellow or buff; and the subalterns, green. The sergeants were to be distinguished by an epaulette or stripe of red cloth sewed upon the right shoulder, and the corporals by one of green. Sometimes the portraits of Gen-

eral Washington exhibit this blue ribbon. Some have deemed this the insignia of a Marshal of France. General Washington never was a Marshal of France. The blue ribbon was simply the distinctive badge first worn by him as commander-in-chief.

The display of the great union flag of the colonies, or striped union flag, as it was called sometimes, General Washington says, in a letter written at the time to Joseph Reed, Secretary to the Committee of Conference, "farcical enough," without knowing or intending it, "gave great joy to the Boston gentry." It seems that a speech of the king of Great Britain had been sent into the camp of the rebels, as the colonists were called, which they burned. Immediately after its receipt the great union flag of the colonies was displayed, and the British signal officer in Boston mistook it for two flags, and so reported it,—the British Union flag above the flag of thirteen stripes, which he supposed to be the flag of the colonies, and therefore interpreted it as a token of submission.

On the evacuation of Boston by the British, this standard, "The Great Union Flag of the Colonies," was, on the entrance of the American army into Boston, carried by Ensign Richards.

This flag floated over the American army in its retreat from Long Island, the defeat at White

Plains, and Washington's daring passage of the Delaware, when full of floating ice, on the stormy Christmas night, December 25, 1775, which preceded the successful battle of Trenton.

The colors of the colonial fleet under Admiral Hopkins, which sailed from the Capes of the Delaware February 17, 1776, were the great union flag of the colonies, with the thirteen stripes alternate red and white, and the admiral's flag — a yellow flag with a black rattlesnake in the attitude of going to strike, and the motto, “Don't tread on me.” This flag also was an emblem of union, as the following letter from Dr. Franklin, dated Philadelphia, December 27, 1775, sets forth :

“I observe on one of the drums of the marines now raising there was painted a rattlesnake, with this motto under it, ‘Don't tread on me.’ As I know it is the custom to have some device on the arms of every country, I suppose this may have been intended for the arms of America ; and as I have nothing to do with public affairs, and as my time is perfectly my own, in order to divert an idle hour I sat down to guess what could have been intended by this uncommon device. I took care, however, to consult, on this occasion, a person who is acquainted with heraldry, from whom I learned that it is a rule among the learned in that science ‘that the worthy properties of the animal, in the

crest-born, shall be considered'; he likewise informed me that the ancients considered the serpent as an emblem of wisdom; and, in a certain attitude, of endless duration, both which circumstances, I suppose, may have been had in view. Having gained this intelligence, and recollecting that countries 'are sometimes represented by animals peculiar to them,' it occurred to me that the rattlesnake is found in no other quarter of the world besides America, and may, therefore, have been chosen on that account to represent her.

"But then, 'the worthy properties' of a snake, I judged, would be hard to point out. This rather raised than suppressed my curiosity; and having frequently seen the rattlesnake, I ran over in my mind every property by which she was distinguished, not only from other animals, but from those of the same genus or class of animals, endeavoring to fix some meaning to each not wholly inconsistent with common-sense.

"I recollected that her eye excelled in brightness that of any other animal, and that she has no eyelids. She may, therefore, be esteemed an emblem of vigilance. She never begins an attack, nor, when once engaged, ever surrenders. She is, therefore, an emblem of magnanimity and true courage. As if anxious to prevent all pretensions of quarreling with her, the weapons with which nature has

furnished her she conceals in the roof of her mouth; so that, to those who are unacquainted with her, she appears to be a defenseless animal. And even when those weapons are shown and extended for defense, they appear weak and contemptible; but their wounds, however small, are decisive and fatal. Conscious of this, she never wounds till she has generously given notice, even to her enemy, and cautioned him against the danger of treading on her. Was I wrong sir, in thinking this a strong picture of the temper and conduct of America?

“The poison of her teeth is the necessary means of digesting her food, and at the same time is certain destruction to her enemies. This may be understood to intimate that those things which are destructive to our enemies may be to us not only harmless, but absolutely necessary to our existence. I confess I was wholly at a loss what to make of the rattles, till I went back and counted them, and found them just thirteen, exactly the number of the colonies united in America; and I recollected, too, that this was the only part of the snake which increased in number.

“Perhaps it might be only fancy, but I conceived the painter had shown a half-formed additional rattle, which I suppose may have been intended to represent the province of Canada. 'T is curious

and amazing to observe how distinct and independent of each other the rattles of this animal are, and yet how firmly they are united together, so as never to be separated but by breaking them to pieces. One of these rattles singly is incapable of producing sound; but the ringing of thirteen together is sufficient to alarm the boldest man living. The rattlesnake is solitary, and associates with her kind only when it is necessary for their preservation. In winter the warmth of a number together will preserve their lives, while singly they would probably perish. The power of fascination attributed to her, by a generous construction may be understood to mean that those who consider the liberty and blessings which America affords, and once come over to her, never afterwards leave her, but spend their lives with her. She strongly resembles America in this, that she is beautiful in youth, and her beauty increaseth with her age; 'her tongue also is blue, and forked as the lightning, and her abode is among impenetrable rocks.'

"Having pleased myself with reflections of this kind, I communicated my sentiments to a neighbor of mine, who has a surprising readiness at guessing at everything which relates to public affairs; and, indeed, I should be jealous of his reputation in that way, was it not that the event constantly shows that he has guessed wrong. He instantly

declared it as his sentiments that the Congress meant to allude to Lord North's declaration in the House of Commons, that he would never relax his measures until he had brought America to his feet; and to intimate to his lordship, that if she was brought to his feet, it would be dangerous treading upon her. But I am positive he has guessed wrong, for I am sure that Congress would not condescend, at this time of day, to take the least notice of his lordship, in that or any other way. In which opinion I am determined to remain your humble servant."

The seal of the War Department bears the rattlesnake with its rattles as the emblem of union, and a liberty cap in contiguity with it,— the liberty cap enveloped by the body, so that the opened mouth may defend the rattles and liberty cap; or union and liberty with the motto, "This we 'll defend."

July 4, 1776, independence was declared. The American flag, however, remained unchanged until June 14, 1777. The British men-of-war finding it easy to sew some strips of white canvas on the red field of the great British Union ensign, and thus convert it into the great union flag of the colonies, thus decoyed into their power and captured many American vessels.

Congress, June 14, 1777, "*Resolved*, That the flag of the thirteen United States be thirteen stripes,

alternate red and white; That the union be thirteen stars, white, in a blue field, representing a new constellation."

The drawing of this flag in the State Department shows the thirteen stars arranged in a circle, the emblem of perpetuity; but the soldiers, who, like sailors, adhere to their traditions with extreme tenacity, could not forget the old crosses, and arranged the stars so as to still preserve the design of the crosses — three stars at the top, three in the middle, three at the bottom, two stars mid-way between the top and middle row, and two stars between the middle and the bottom row. The stars in the rows of two stars each rested upon what had been the saltier of St. Andrew, and thus the union of the crosses of St. George and St. Andrew, were indicated on the flag. This was the stars and stripes, or the star-spangled banner of our Revolutionary War.

Such a flag as this had never been displayed by any nation nor by any human hand. The nearest type of it was at the passage of the Red Sea by the Israelites. Israel was encamped over against the tall light-house of Pihahiroth. Pharaoh, by the advice of the magicians, had erected on Pihahiroth a huge brazen serpent — Baal Typhon — to check the passage of the Israelites. The serpent was then the great emblem of divinity in Egypt.

Otherwise Moses would not have been ordered by God to cause Aaron to cast his rod before Pharaoh, that it might turn to a serpent to prove to Pharaoh that Moses acted under a divine commission. When the pillar of cloud and fire moved to the rear of Israel and enveloped the hosts of Egypt in the darkness as of death, the pathway of Israel glowed with the radiance of God. The pellucid azure of the night of Egypt, studded with its myriads of stars like molten silver, and striped with the glory of the divine aurora, made the very heaven itself a starry banner of blue, red, and white, displayed by Jehovah, Lord God of Sabaoth. The brazen serpent, glowing as if of fire, made it the type of the overthrow of Pharaoh. When the Israelites lusted after the flesh-pots of Egypt, they were punished by fiery serpents, and cured by an act of faith, in looking up to a brazen serpent erected by Moses by divine command, which recalled the tremendous event in which the Jehovah they proposed to desert had, as Moses sung, “triumphed gloriously.” The raising upon a pole of the brazen serpent in the wilderness by Moses had evident reference to this great salvation of a defenseless and unorganized multitude, by a right hand not their own. The parallel would be readily obvious to Nicodemus, “A master in Israel,” when a greater than Moses said to him, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the

wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up."

In a design for a great seal of the United States, submitted to Congress by a committee of no less eminent men than Dr. Franklin, Mr. John Adams, and Mr. Thomas Jefferson, the crest was to be the eye of Providence in a triangle, its glory extending over the whole shield, etc., with the motto, *E pluribus unum* ("One composed of many"), on the back. Rays from the pillar of fire and cloud beamed upon Moses as Pharaoh was overthrown in the Red Sea, with the motto, "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God." This design, however, was not adopted.

Our ancestors drew most of their anti-types from the Bible. The grape-vines in the arms of Connecticut, with the motto, *Qui transtulit sustinet* ("Who brought us across the ocean sustains us"); the tree on the early coins of Massachusetts; the green tree, with the motto, "Appeal to Heaven," on the flag of the floating batteries before Boston, and the Massachusetts cruisers, were used as types of God's chosen people and reliance upon the protection of Providence. Union and dependence upon Providence in the coat-of-arms of the United States are the chief bearings. Our coins bear the stamp, *E pluribus unum*, and "In God we trust."

A writer in the "Massachusetts Historical Collections" intimates the tree on the coins commonly

called “pine-tree shillings” was a cedar, not a pine-tree. Ezekiel was a favorite with the preachers of those days. In the seventeenth chapter of Ezekiel much is said of cedar-trees and vines as types of nations. A great eagle is there spoken of as taking the topmost branch of the cedar of Lebanon and carrying it into a land of traffic and setting it in a city of merchants. May not such trains of thought have suggested the eagle in the arms of the United States and on their coins?

The star-spangled banner, heretofore described, remained unaltered until January 13, 1794, when it was enacted, “That from and after the 1st day of May, Anno Domini 1795, the flag of the United States be fifteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be fifteen stars white in a blue field.”

This was the flag of the United States in the War of 1812-14, in which Andrew Jackson and Winfield Scott, especially, won so much distinction.

In 1818 the flag was again changed. Mr. Wendenover, an M. C. from New-York, suggested that at the rate the United States were growing the tallest pine in Maine would not make a mast tall enough to hoist the flag upon if a stripe was added for each new State.

A resolution was passed (approved April 4, 1818), “That from and after the 4th day of July next, the flag of the United States be thirteen horizontal

stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be twenty stars, white, in a blue field. And that on the admission of a new State into the Union, one star be added to the union of the flag; and that such addition take effect on the 4th day of July next succeeding such admission."

The flag planted on the national palace of the City of Mexico by the United States army commanded by General Winfield Scott had thirty stars in the union, and, of course, the thirteen alternate stripes of red and white.

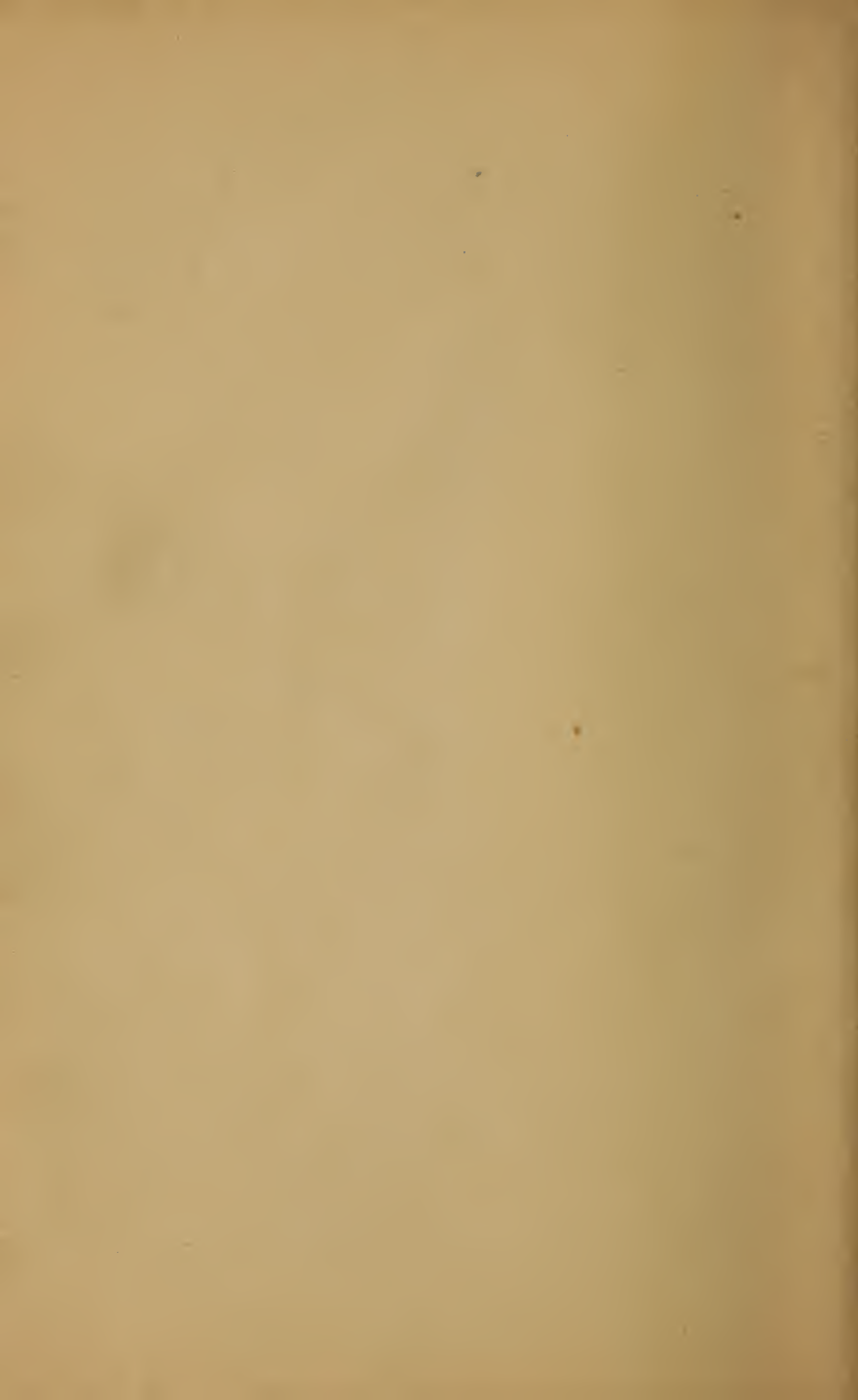
Our flag, now, October, 1886, has thirty-eight stars in its union, thanks to the people of the United States, under their great leader President Lincoln; thanks to the courage of the officers, soldiers, and sailors who followed the wise and heroic leadership of General Grant and Admiral Farragut.

Grant, in journeying around the world for his own and his country's sake, received ovations from the potentates of the whole world such as never before fell to the lot of mortal man.

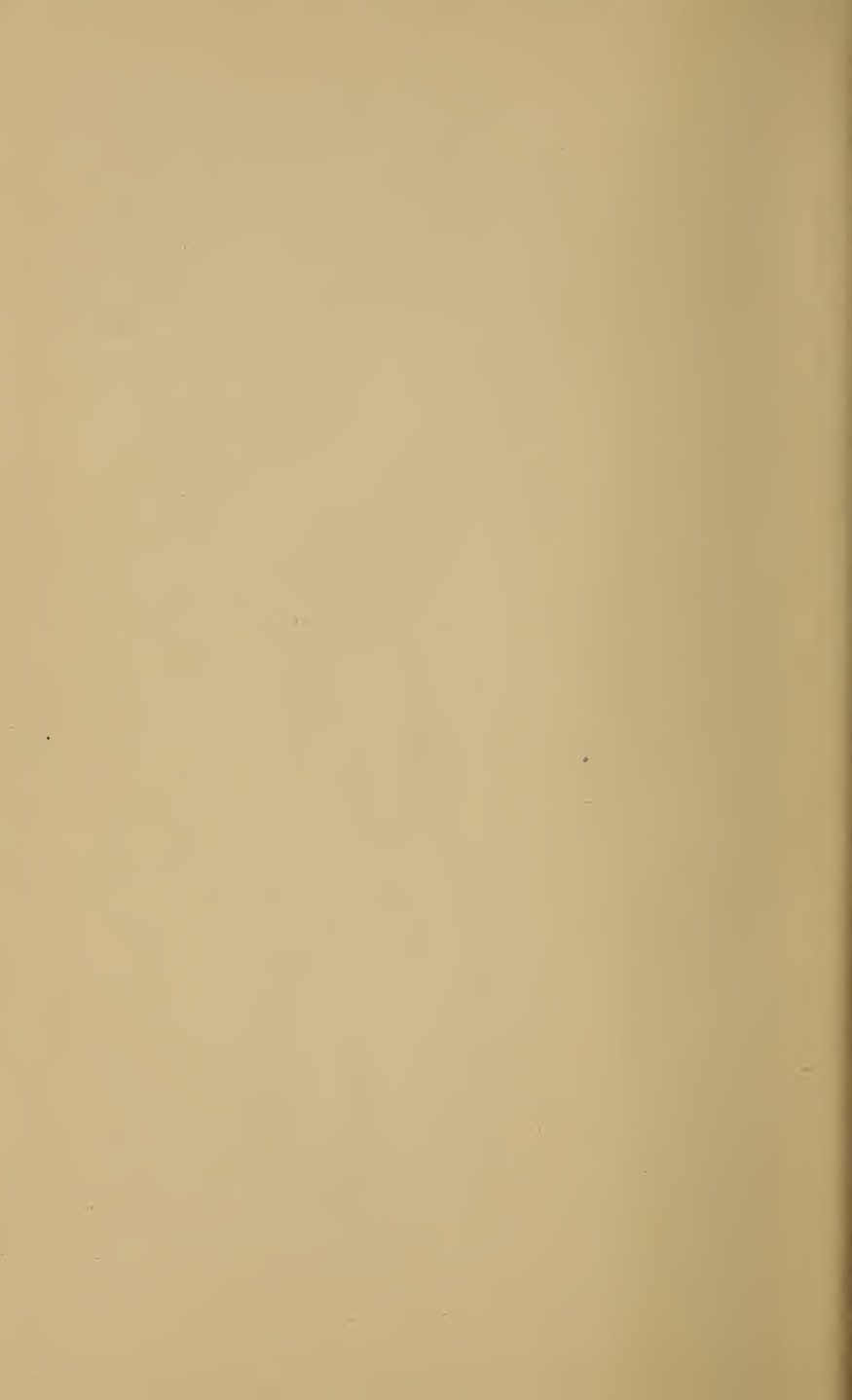
Abraham Lincoln died doing his duty. The whole world, including China, Japan, and the far-off isles of the sea, bewailed his death. The country he lived and died for lives and prospers.

God bless our flag forever!



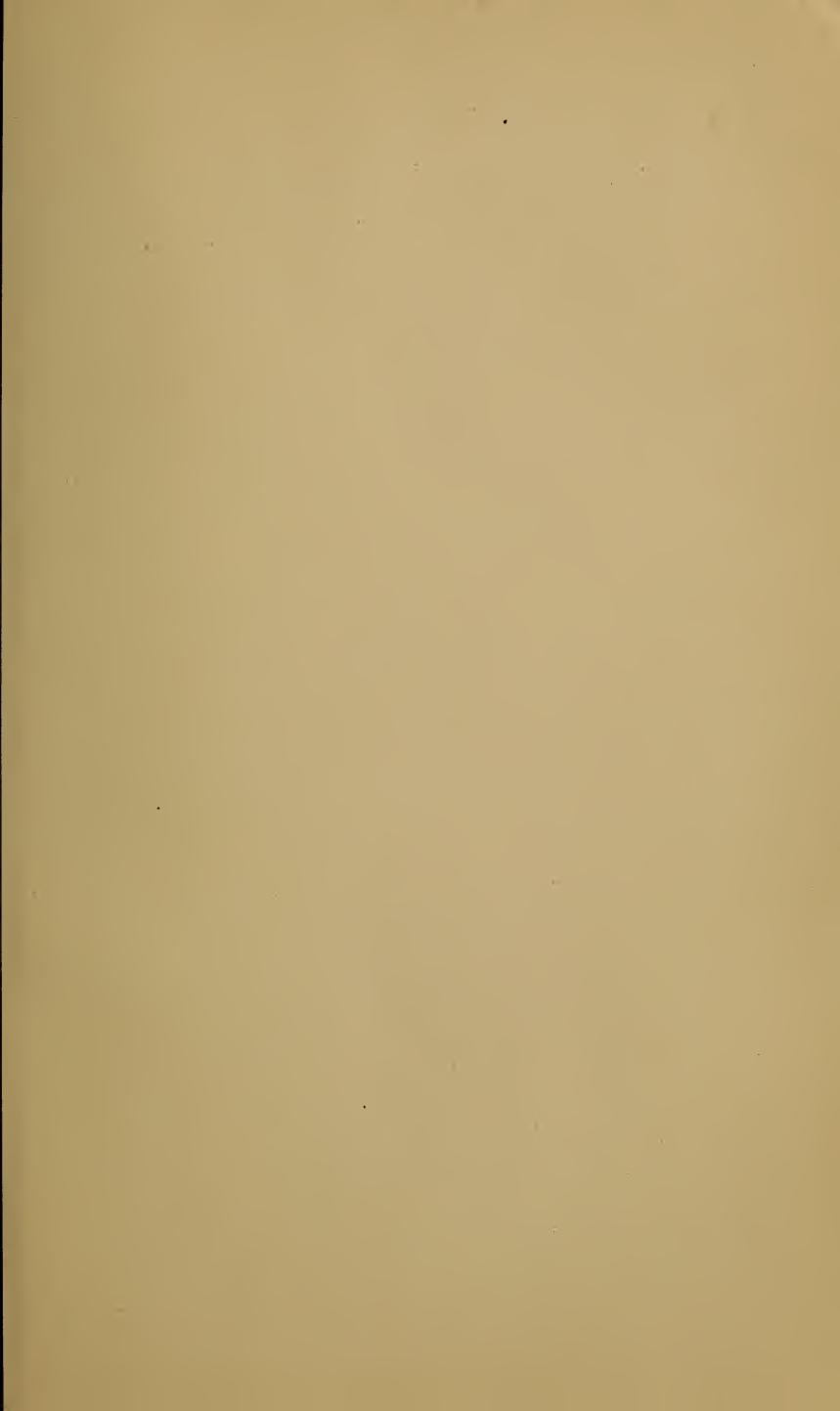




































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